



US009228779B2

(12) **United States Patent**
Zagar et al.

(10) **Patent No.:** **US 9,228,779 B2**
(45) **Date of Patent:** **Jan. 5, 2016**

(54) **INFRARED FLOAT BAR**

(75) Inventors: **Steven J. Zagar**, Luxemburg, WI (US);
Michael O. Rocheleau, DePere, WI
(US); **Les Peterson**, DePere, WI (US)

(73) Assignee: **MegTec Systems, Inc.**, DePere, WI (US)

(*) Notice: Subject to any disclaimer, the term of this
patent is extended or adjusted under 35
U.S.C. 154(b) by 429 days.

(21) Appl. No.: **12/792,294**

(22) Filed: **Jun. 2, 2010**

(65) **Prior Publication Data**

US 2011/0131829 A1 Jun. 9, 2011

Related U.S. Application Data

(60) Provisional application No. 61/184,353, filed on Jun.
5, 2009.

(51) **Int. Cl.**
F26B 3/34 (2006.01)
F26B 3/30 (2006.01)
(Continued)

(52) **U.S. Cl.**
CPC **F26B 3/30** (2013.01); **B41F 23/0413**
(2013.01); **F26B 3/283** (2013.01); **F26B**
13/104 (2013.01)

(58) **Field of Classification Search**
CPC F26B 3/83; F26B 3/30; F26B 13/10;
F26B 13/104; F26B 13/14; F26B 13/145;
F26B 13/18; F26B 13/283; F26B 3/283;
B41F 23/0413; B01D 5/00; B29C 35/045;
D21F 5/002; D21F 5/00; F21V 29/02
USPC 34/263, 618, 643, 639, 640, 641,
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See application file for complete search history.

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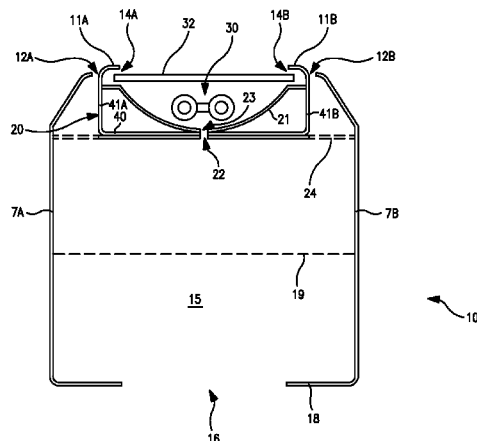
Assistant Examiner — Bao D Nguyen

(74) *Attorney, Agent, or Firm* — Nields, Lemack & Frame,
LLC

(57) **ABSTRACT**

Infrared air float bar for use in floating and drying a continuous planar web of a material in a dryer. Direct radiated or reflected infrared electromagnetic energy from an infrared light source in a removable channel assembly accelerates drying, or evaporation of solvents, or curing of web material passing in proximity to the bar, either by infrared electromagnetic energy, or in combination with convention airflow. The infrared source is cooled by pressurized air passing through an interior portion of the removable air bar channel assembly, and the air is further conducted into fluid contact with the web in an air gap between the emitter and web to promote convective heat transfer and to contribute to the air pressure field supporting web flotation. The removable channel assembly is configured for replacement of the infrared emitter and to allow the setting of the pressurized cooling air flow to the optimum level.

11 Claims, 13 Drawing Sheets



- (51) **Int. Cl.**
B41F 23/04 (2006.01)
F26B 3/28 (2006.01)
F26B 13/20 (2006.01)
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FIG. 1

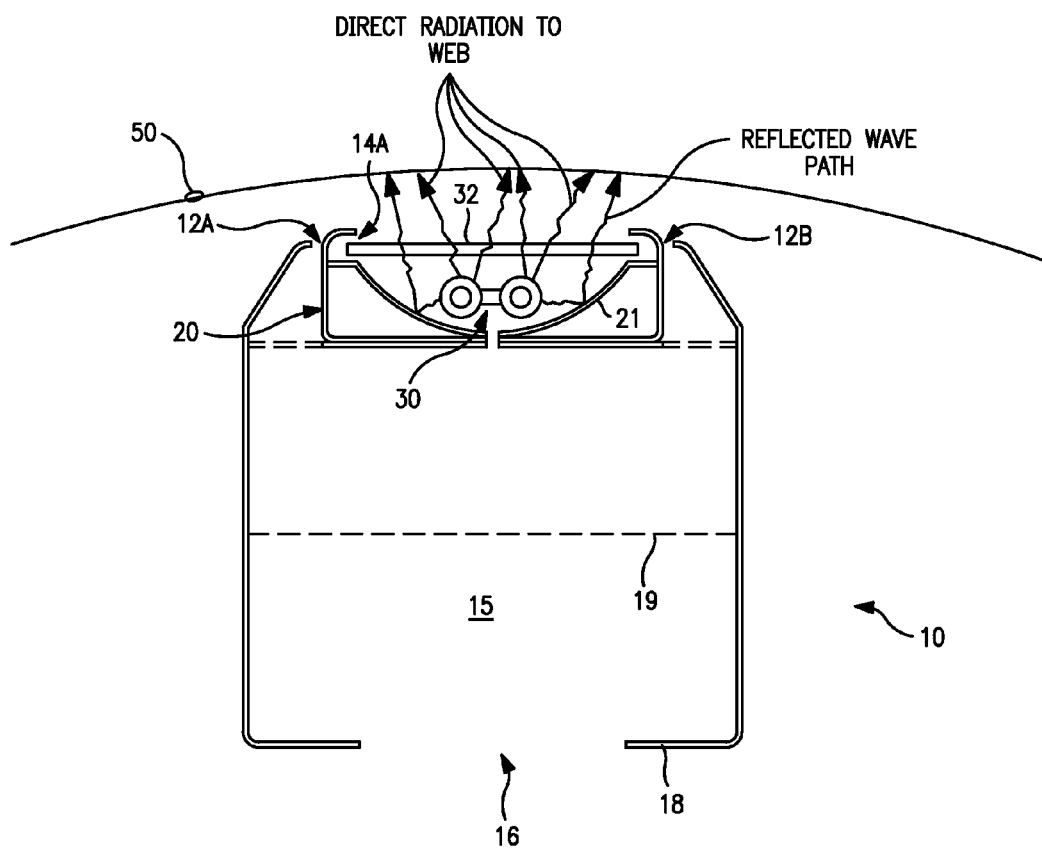


FIG. 2

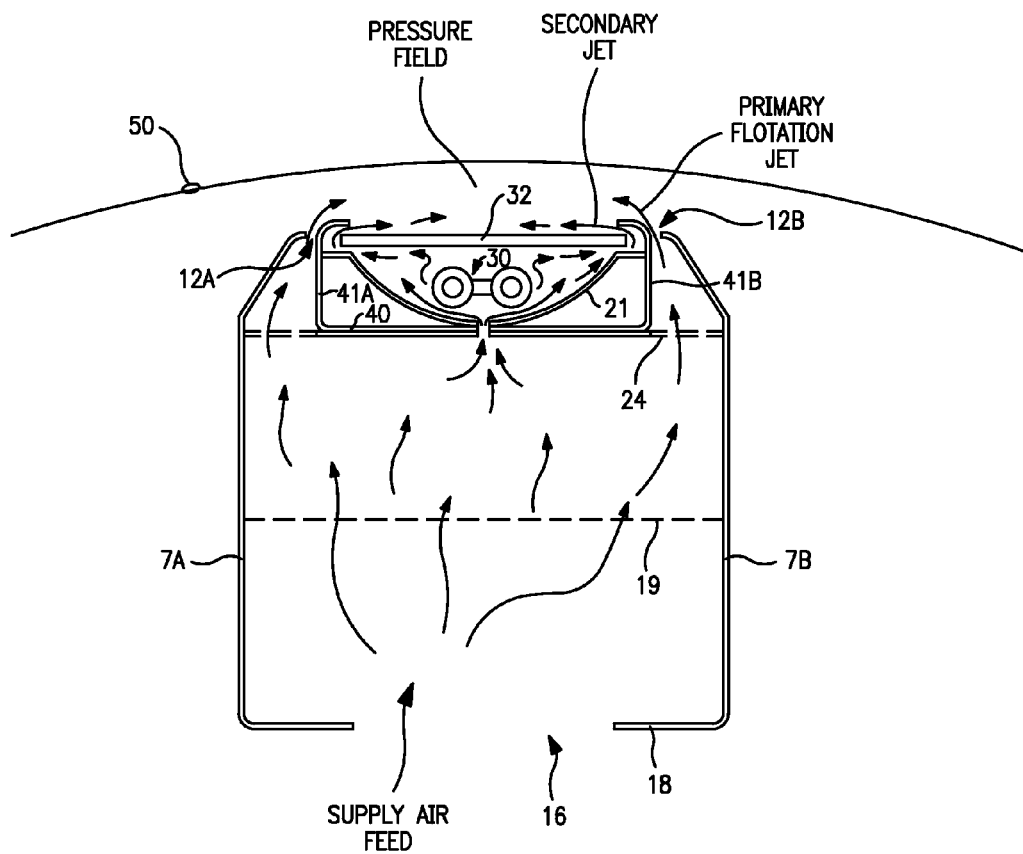


FIG. 3

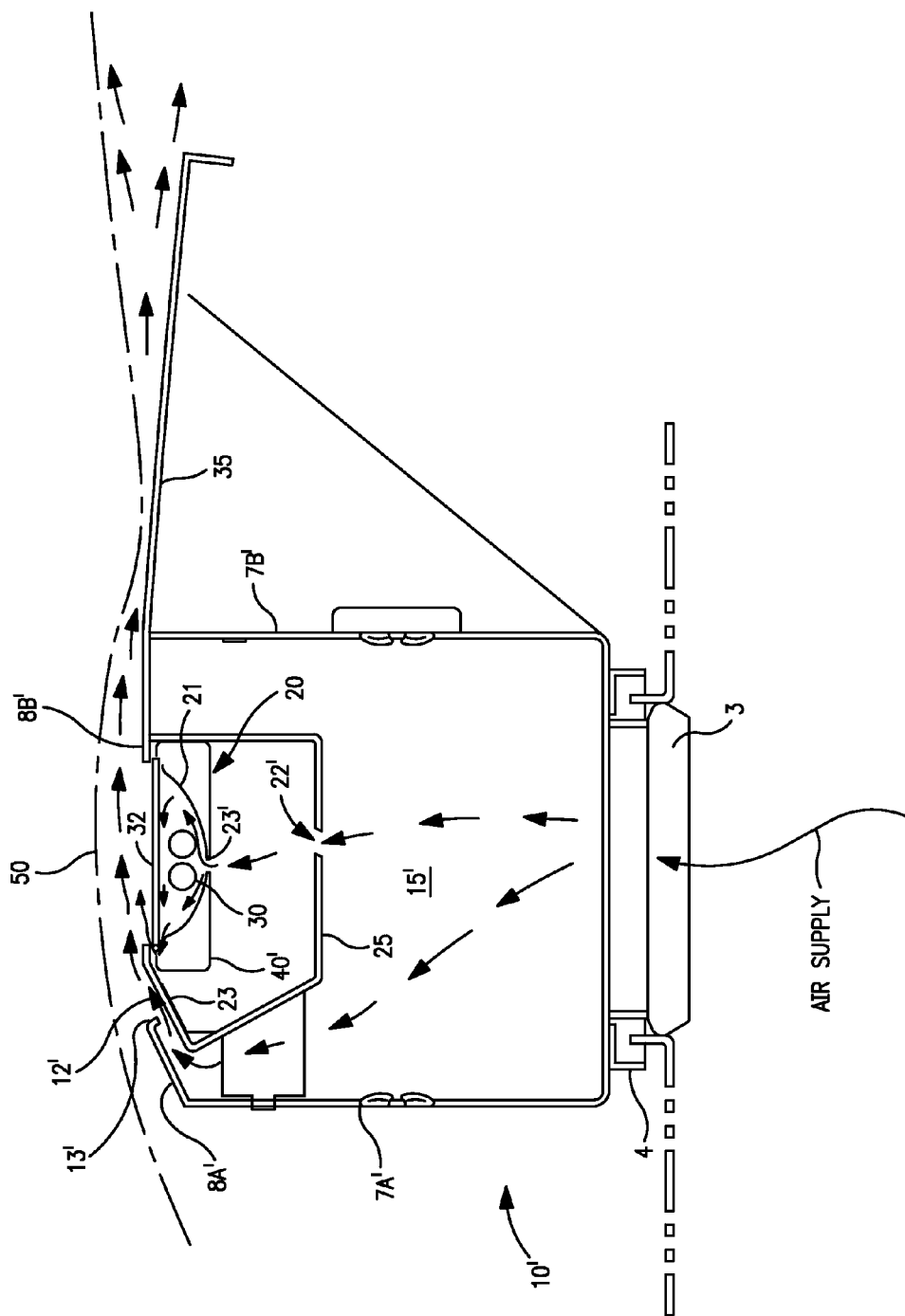


FIG. 4

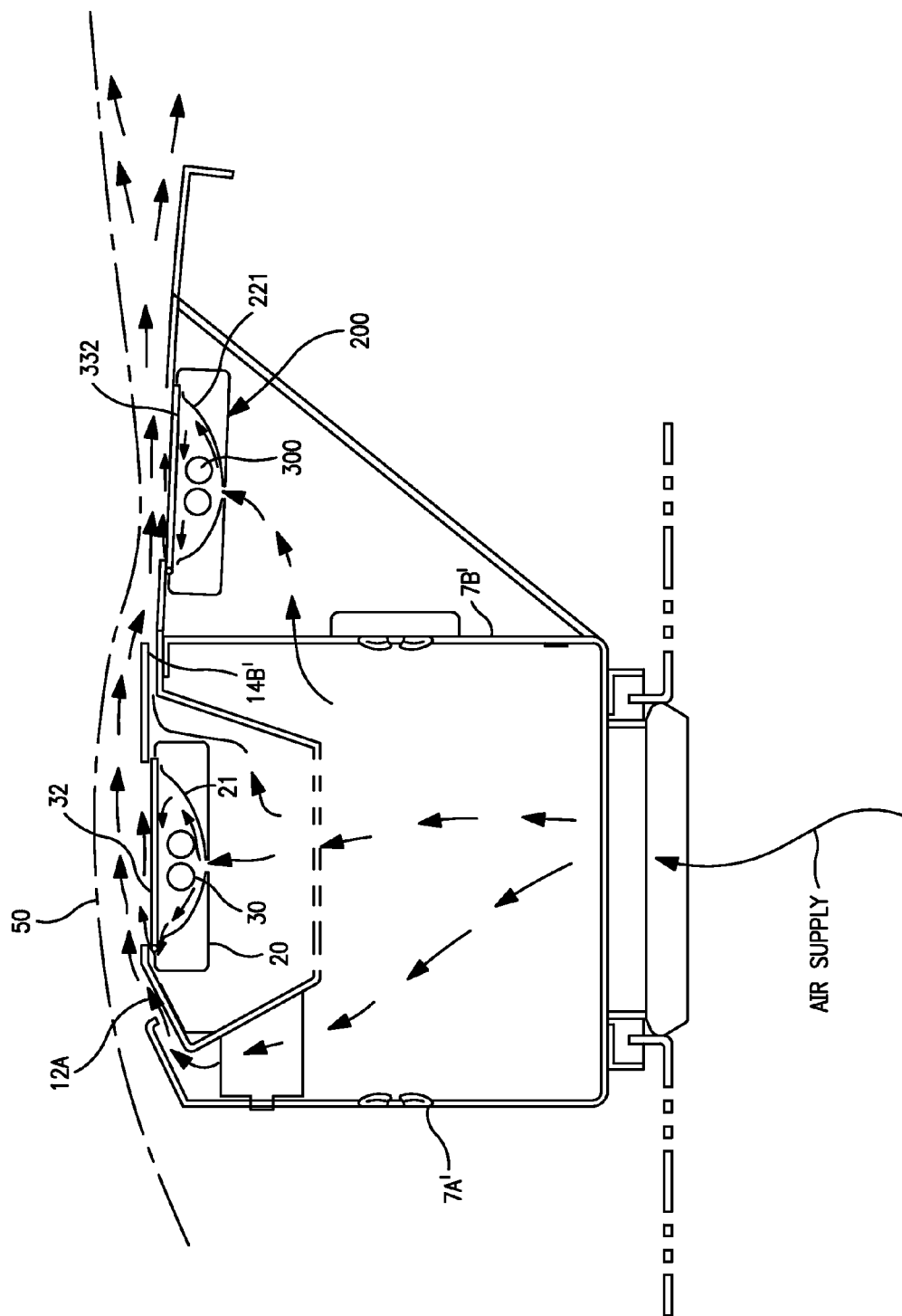


FIG. 5

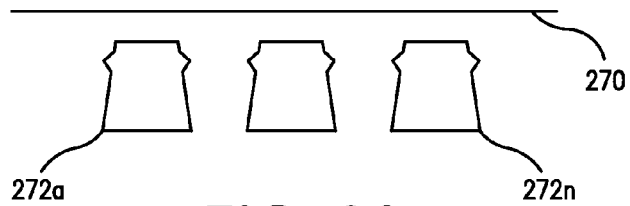


FIG. 6A

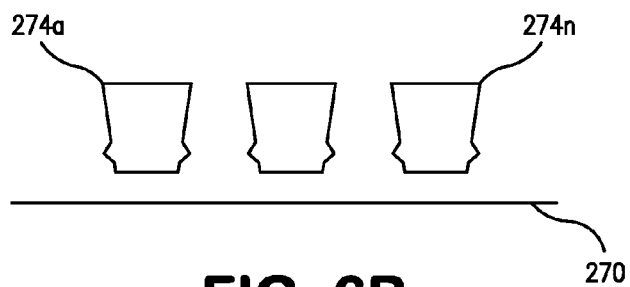


FIG. 6B

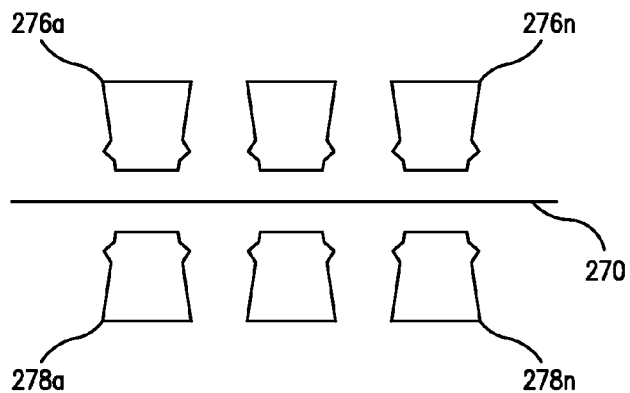


FIG. 6C

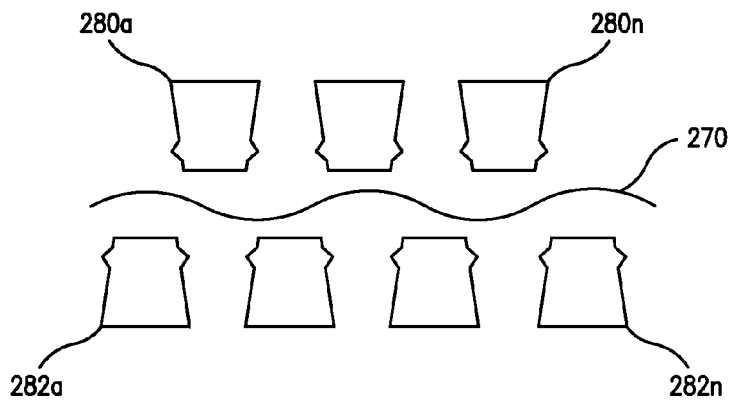


FIG. 6D

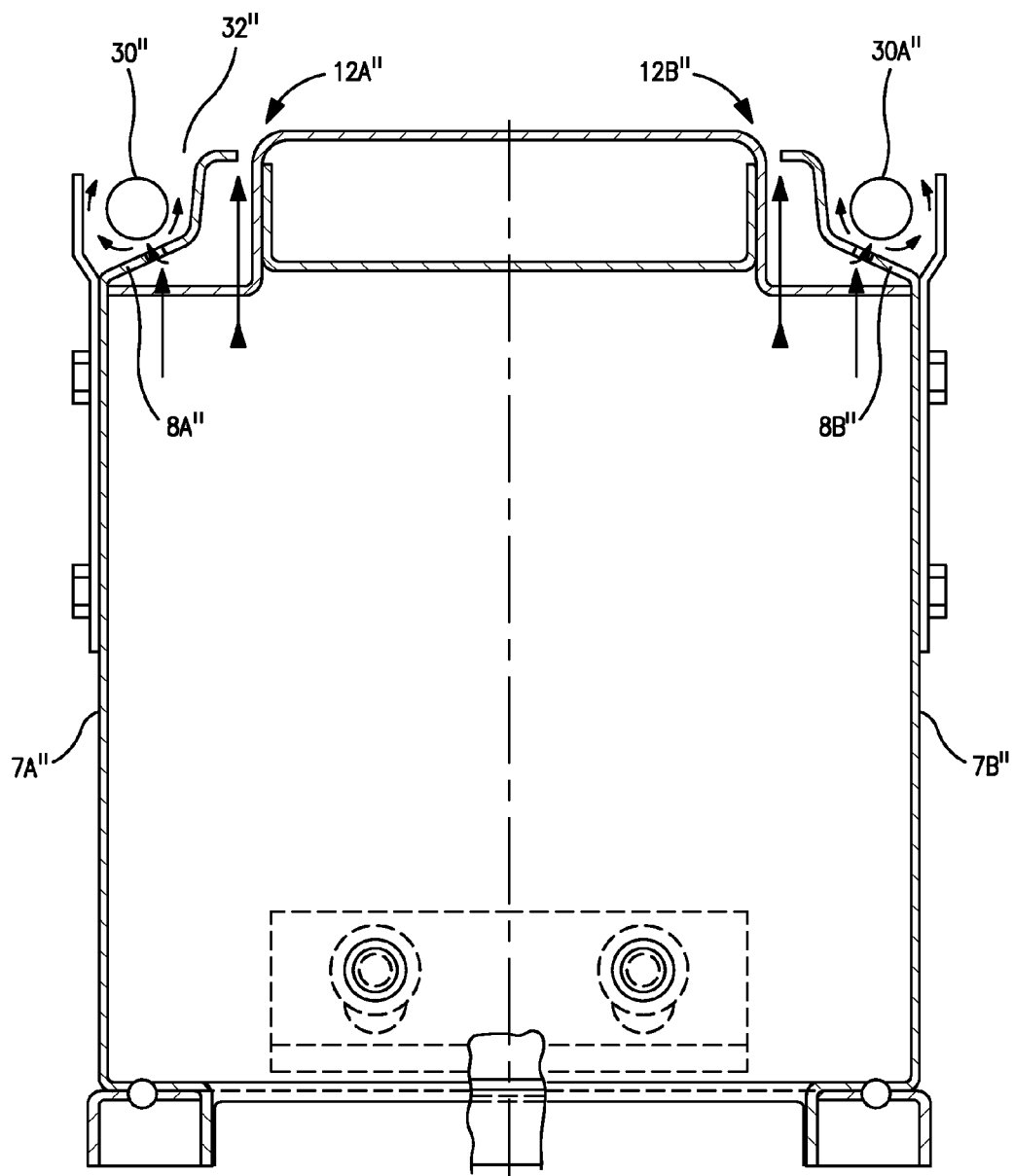


FIG. 7

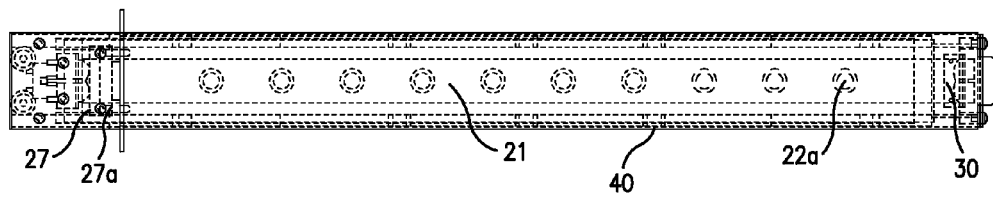


FIG. 8A

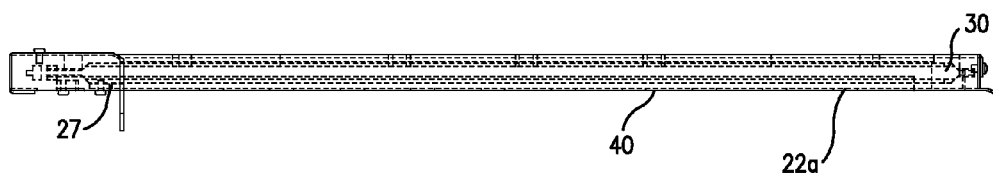


FIG. 8B

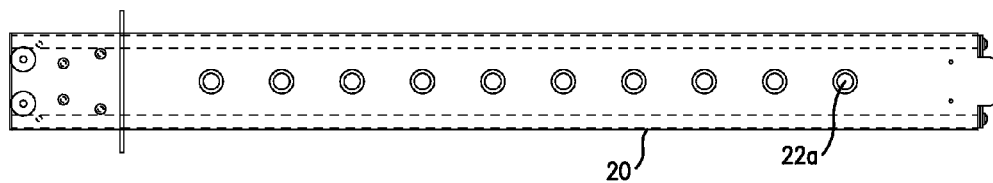


FIG. 8C

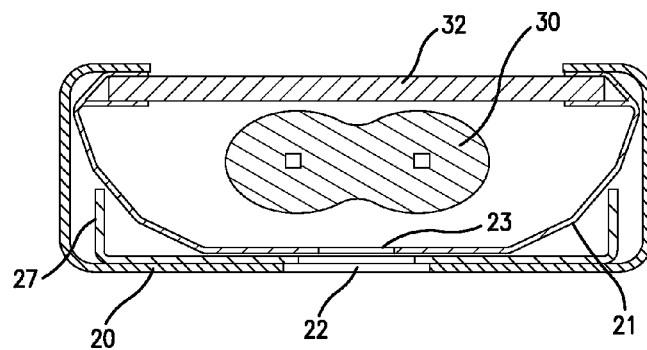


FIG. 8D

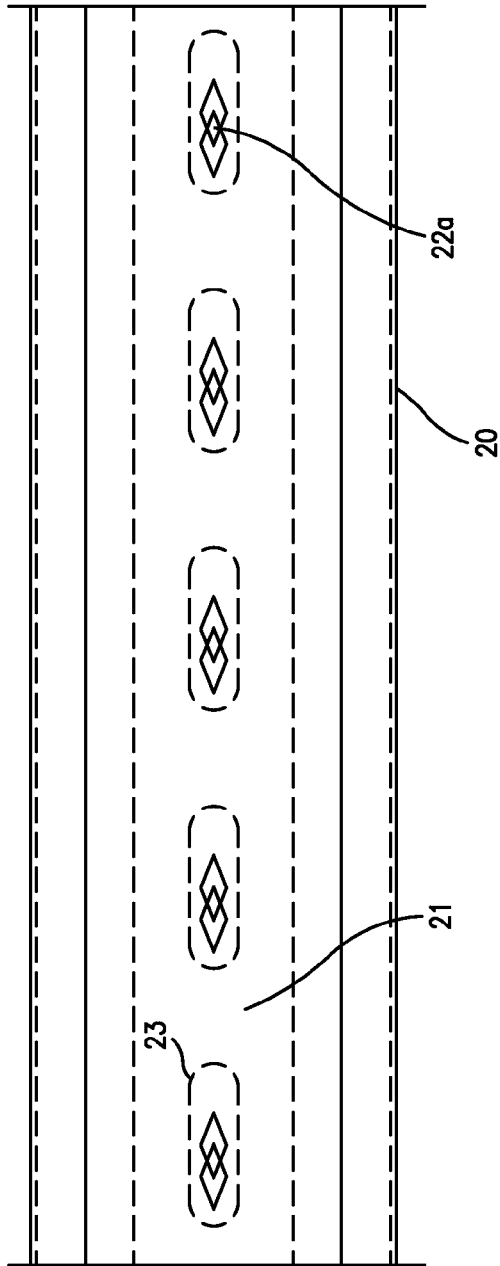


FIG. 9A

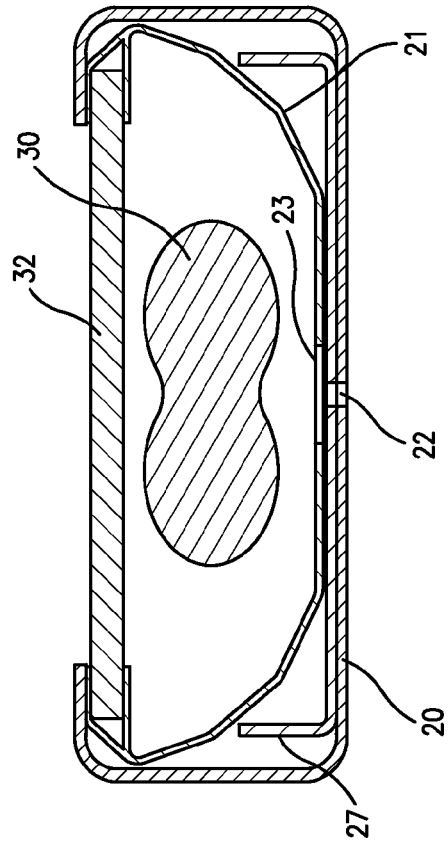


FIG. 9B

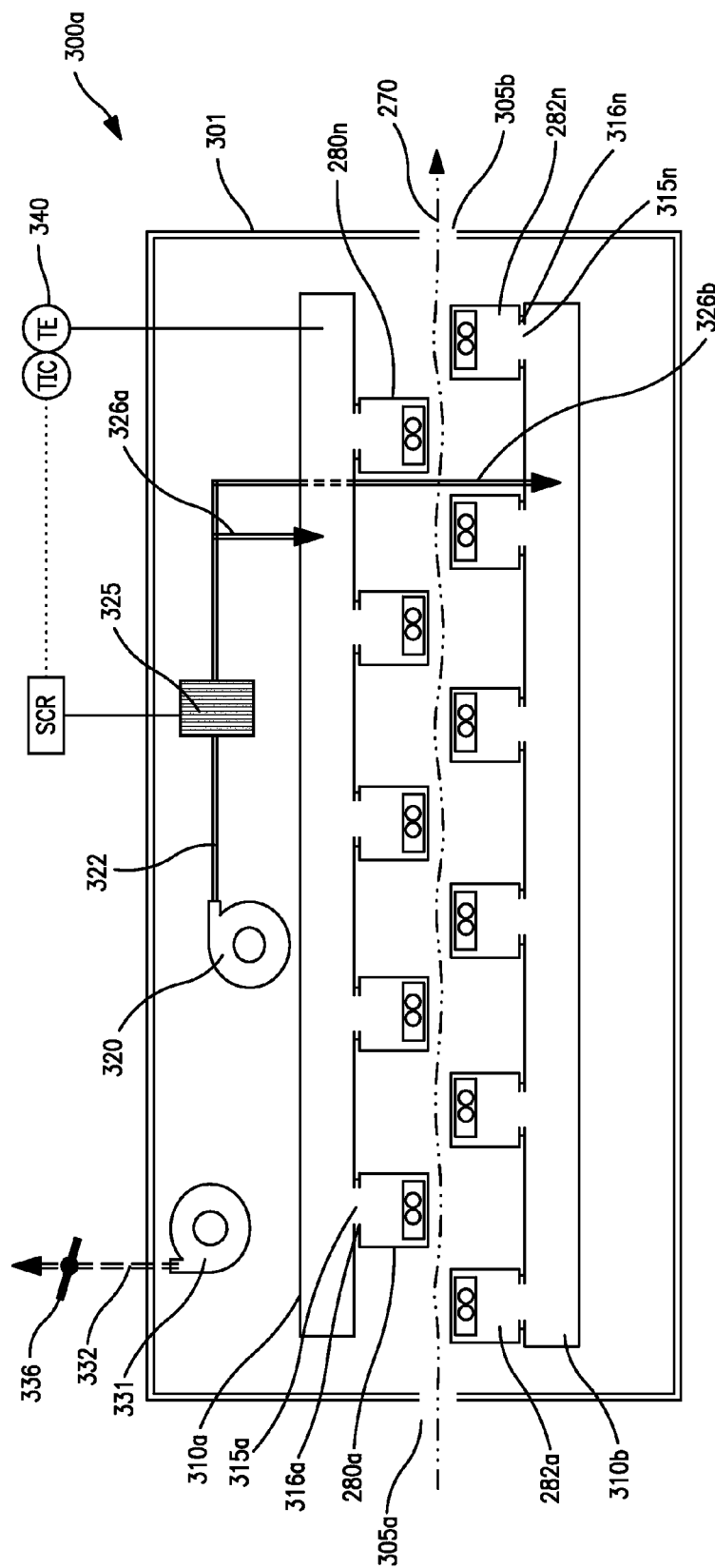


FIG. 10

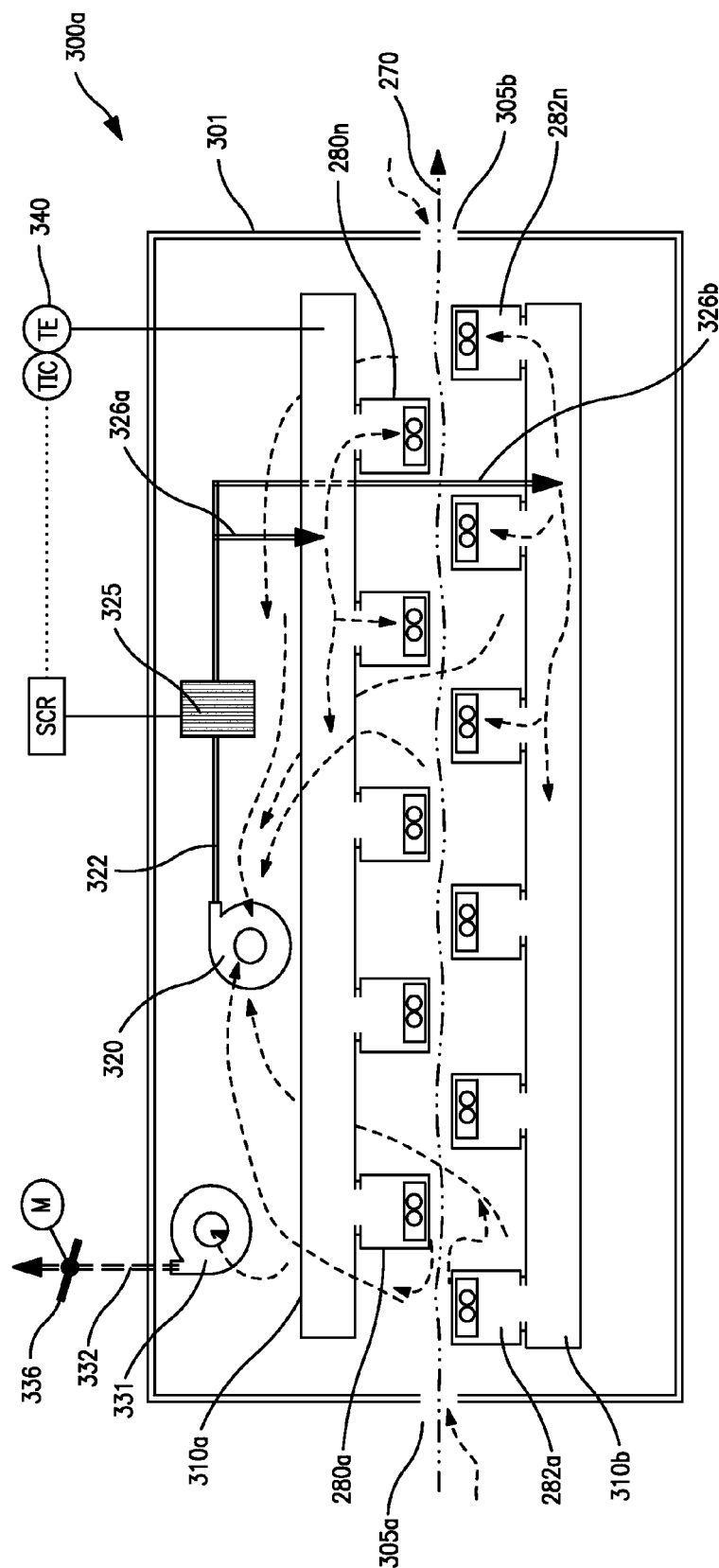


FIG. 11

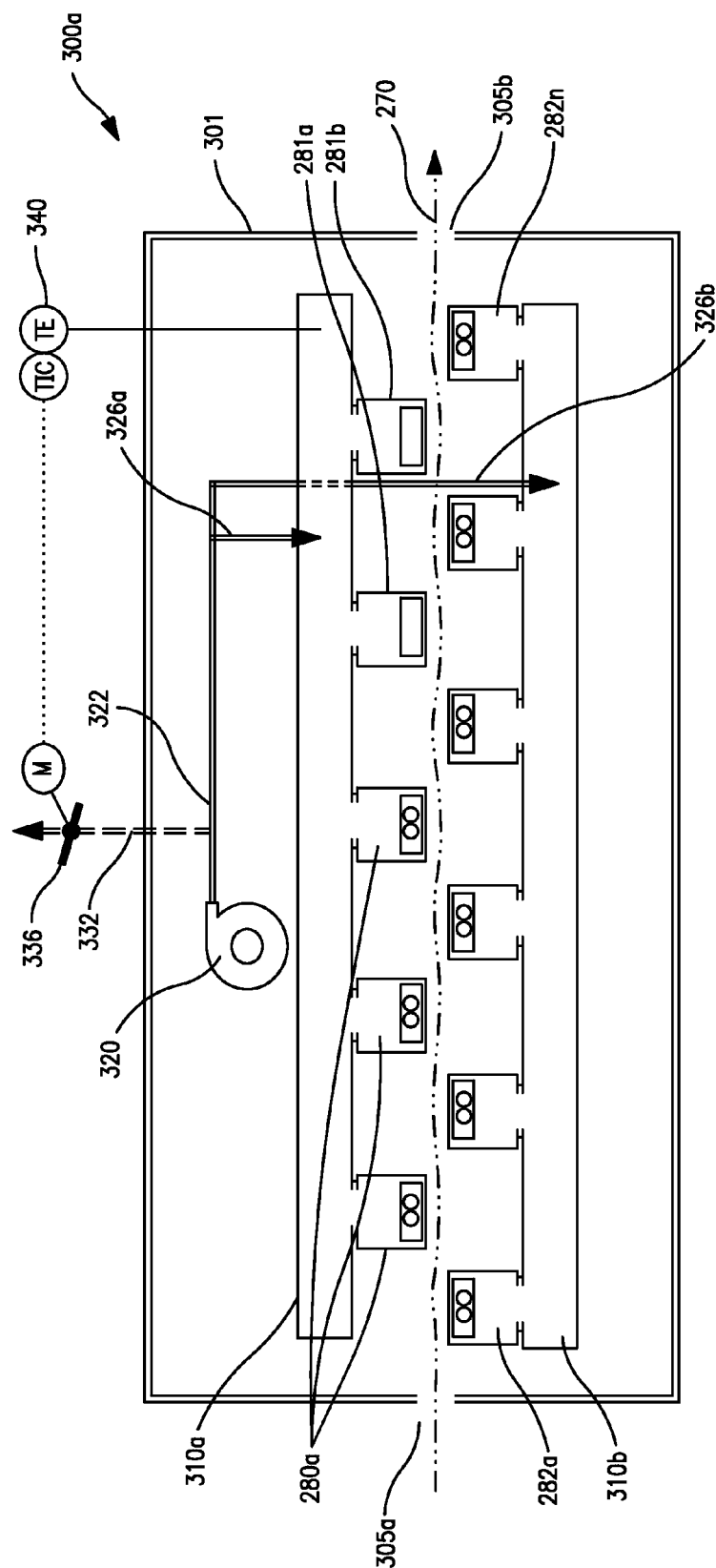


FIG. 12

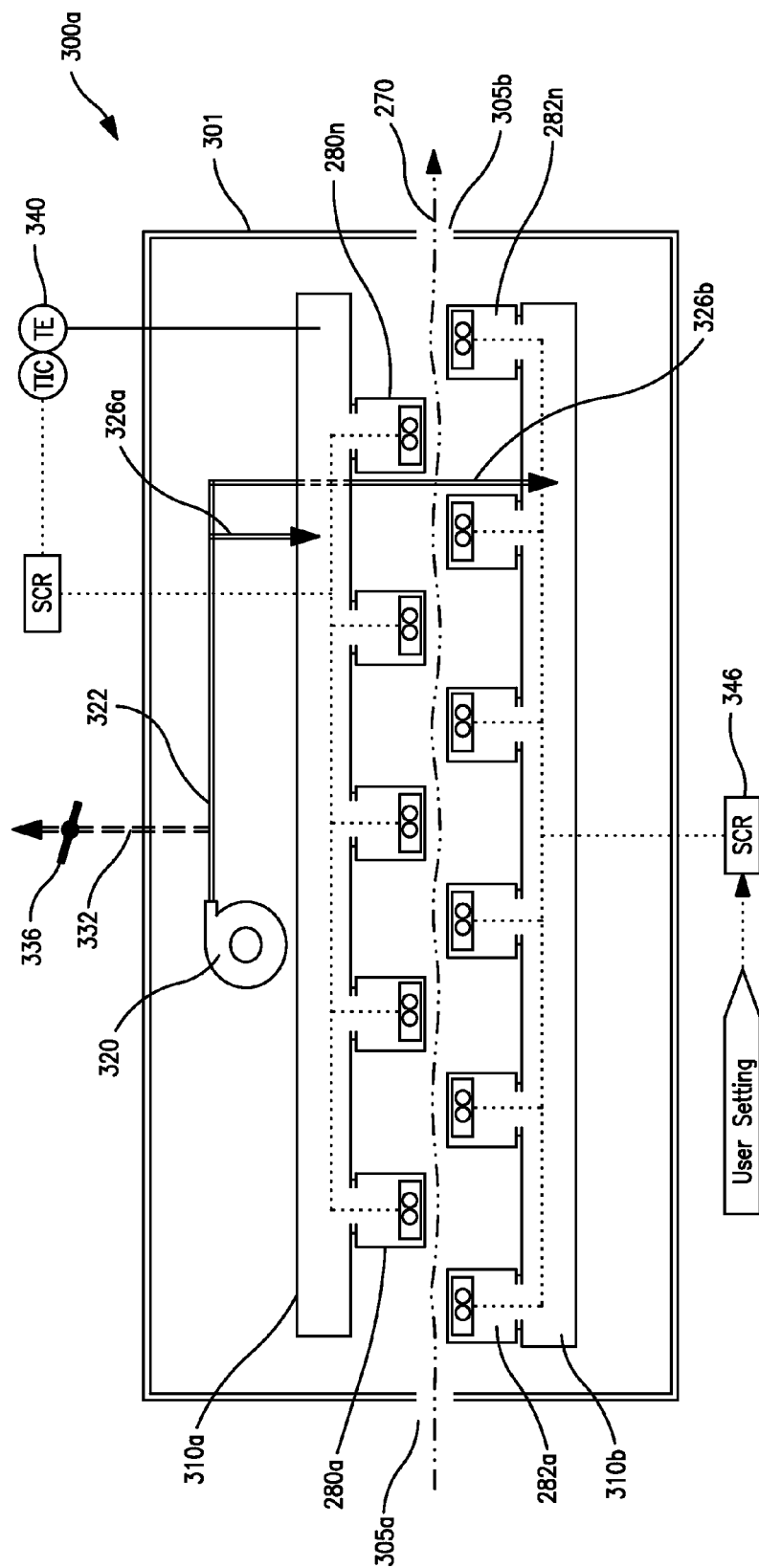


FIG. 13

INFRARED FLOAT BAR

This application claims priority of U.S. Provisional Application Ser. No. 61/184,353 filed Jun. 5, 2009, the disclosure of which is incorporated herein by reference.

BACKGROUND

Embodiments disclosed herein relate to an air float bar for use in positioning, drying or curing a continuous generally planar flexible material such as a web, printed web, newsprint, film material, or plastic sheet. More particularly, they pertain to an air float bar whose pressure pad area includes an infrared light source, such as an infrared bulb, a reflector surface and a lens to enhance accelerated infrared heating of web material to cause solvent evaporation, drying and/or curing. Electromagnetic infrared heat energy in combination with jets of air impinging upon the web surface provide for concentrated heating of the web material, thereby providing subsequent rapid evaporation, drying and/or curing from the surface of the material.

U.S. Pat. No. 5,035,066 (Wimberger) teaches the integration of an infrared emitter into a Coanda-type flotation air bar. Cooling air is brought through a channel assembly that encloses the emitter. A quartz lens is used to enclose the emitter while allowing transmission of electromagnetic energy in the range of infrared wavelengths to pass from the channel assembly enclosure to the web. In one embodiment, said cooling air, after passing around the emitter inside said channel assembly, is discharged through holes in a quartz lens of said emitter channel assembly. Although this arrangement provides some recovery of heat by discharging said cooling air to the web surface after flowing around said emitter, the flow path is not optimized for both cooling of the emitter and recovering of heat to the air which is subsequently impinged on the web. The prior art arrangement with passage of air through holes in the quartz lens does not provide optimum fluid contact to effectively cool the emitter and lens as is desired in order to maintain longevity of these components against thermal degradation or contamination. Nor does it maximize the recovery of heat from the emitter, lens and reflector. It is further desirable to keep the emitter and lens free from contamination by aggressive solvent vapors, liquids such as inks and/or coating materials, and other contaminants such as paper dust or chards of material from broken webs. Cooling and prevention of contamination of the reflector is also desirable for the same reasons as discussed for the lens. If such contamination occurs, the infrared energy is absorbed by the quartz material of the emitter and quartz lens instead of being transmitted through said quartz to the web surface, which results in loss of drying and heat transfer efficiency, and also promotes thermal degradation as the design temperatures of the emitter and lens materials may easily be exceeded. Similarly, contamination will reduce the reflectivity of the reflector resulting in loss of drying and heat transfer efficiency and material thermal degradation.

As is known to those skilled in the art of infrared dryers, it is desired to prevent possible ignition of combustible materials, such a paper web, should said combustible materials come into contact with hot surfaces. It is further desired to have a quick acting means of interrupting the heat flux from the infrared emitter from reaching the web to prevent ignition of a stationary or broken web. A means of blocking the infrared heat flux is taught in U.S. Pat. Nos. 6,049,995 and 6,195,909 (Rogne et al.) but requires detection and an active mechanical means to assure that the web is not exposed to temperatures exceeding the ignition temperature of materials

being processed. As is known to those skilled in the art, it is often desirable to use fast-cooling tungsten or carbon filament emitters as are available from Heraeus Noblelight of Hanau, Germany. These fast-cooling elements minimize the time necessary to bring the infrared heat flux and associated surface temperatures low enough avoid ignition of said combustible materials should the web stop or break during an upset to the drying process. Even with such quick cooling emitters, it is desirable to keep the exposed surfaces of the air float bar as cool as possible at all times to prevent possible ignition of said combustible materials, even when web stoppage or a web breakage upset may go undetected.

It is also known to those skilled in the art of drying materials by means of infrared energy that the amount of heat effectively absorbed by the material is dependant on a number of key factors, including the temperature of the emitter, the geometry defining the infrared light paths to the materials, and the absorption characteristic of the materials to be dried. It is desired to select an emitter type such that its temperature will emit maximum electromagnetic energy flux in the range of wavelengths that correspond with the wavelengths of maximum absorption in the material to be dried. In the case of a coated web the materials typically include the base web substrate, and a coating comprised of solids, and a solvent such as water or an organic solvent, said solvent to be dried. Each of these materials exhibits an infrared absorption characteristic as a function of infrared wavelength, or spectra, which is to be considered in the selection of the type of emitter to be used.

In some cases, such as printing, the coating or ink is not applied to the substrate uniformly in all areas. In such cases it is desirable to maximize the infrared energy flux to the areas having coating or ink while minimizing the energy flow to uncoated (unprinted) areas. The locations of the coated and uncoated areas are variable according to the product to be dried. One prior art method used to effect the direction of drying energy to areas requiring drying while limiting energy to areas not requiring drying prescribes the selection of the emitter such that it will provide high infrared heat flux at a range of wavelengths that match high absorption wavelengths for the solvent, while minimizing the emission of infrared energy at wavelengths where absorption in the dry solids and the substrate is low. Another prior art method arranges a plurality of emitter lamps in an array wherein the emitter lamps may be activated (energized) or deactivated (de-energized) to emit infrared energy approximately matching the physical location of the areas to be dried. In the drying of moving continuous webs having widely variable patterns of printed and unprinted areas, this method of activating and deactivating a fixed array is only practically capable of directing drying energy on a spatially coarse scale. The infrared energy can be applied more or less in lanes along the length of the web to be dried, which does not address the need to limit drying heat to the unprinted areas that lie between printed areas along the direction of web travel.

SUMMARY

The embodiments disclosed herein offer an improvement over the prior art by guiding the cooling air in a path which maximizes the cooling of an emitter, an optional lens and reflector surfaces while providing additional convective heat transfer to the web and additional web flotation support, while shielding surfaces of said emitter, lens and reflector from contaminants described earlier. Exposed surfaces of the air float bar are kept at the lowest possible temperature to mini-

mize the risk of ignition of the web or other materials being processed without the use of mechanical shutters or shields.

The general purpose of the embodiments disclosed is to provide an infrared air float bar for use in the heating and/or drying of webs, such as for use in a web dryer. The design of the air float bar element may be selected from several types as are known to those skilled in the art. Example designs of float bars are taught by Frost, U.S. Pat. No. 3,549,070, and Rocheleau, U.S. Publ. No. 2005/223593, but it is to be understood that the flotation bar element of the present invention is not limited to these particular examples. Included are one or more infrared emitters integrated into the air float bar for the generation and transmission of infrared electromagnetic radiation to the web, and additional heat is transferred to the web by convection air having been heated convectively in the process of cooling the emitter and associated reflector and lens elements.

It can be appreciated by those skilled in the art that air flotation bars provide convective heat and/or mass transfer owing to the action of the air jets on the web as it is floatingly supported in an array of one or more air bars. The air supplied to said jets may be heated by an independent heat source, such as an electric resistance coil, hot oil or steam coil, or a burner located in the ducting supplying the air to one or more air bars in the dryer. In the case of an infrared air flotation bar, cooling air is heated by the infrared emitter, and thus heated becomes a medium for enhanced convection heat transfer and mass transfer to the web within the dryer. Said cooling air, now heated, may be brought in to convective contact with the web to enhance heat transfer. In embodiments disclosed herein, the cooling air path is arranged and the air flow mass adjusted to provide sufficient cooling to protect element surfaces as previously mentioned and to avoid potential ignition of web materials while maximizing the temperature and therefore the amount of useable energy taken up by the cooling air for use in heating and drying the web. Furthermore, the heated cooling air and flotation air jets are discharged and mingled in the area directly between the web and air bar and transfer heat convectively while floatingly supporting the web.

After convectively contacting the web, the combined air may be drawn back to the air supply of the dryer and a portion re-circulated again to supply the one or more air bars. Energy consumption to run the dryer is minimized when the amount of air re-circulated is maximized. The exhaust ventilation rate, that is the balance of air not re-circulated, may be set by those skilled in the art of drying to maintain a desired wet bulb temperature within the dryer such that the drying rate is maximized. Typically in the case of drying non-flammable solvents such as water, the re-circulation rate may be maximized to a high level, often in the range of 50 to 95% of the total convection drying air flow supplied to the air bars. In the case of flammable solvents, the ventilation rate is most often set to meet the ventilation safety requirements requiring the dryer to operate well below, typically 25% of, the lower explosive limit concentration of the solvent or solvents being dried. In a preferred embodiment, the supply air to one or more infrared flotation air bars nozzles is heated only by the infrared emitter elements, that is no other independent heater is required to heat the supply air, this saving space and component costs for air handling equipment. In a most preferred embodiment, by maximizing the re-circulated air within the dryer in a range from 70 to 95%, the convection air supplied to the infrared flotation nozzles may be heated to a desired temperature, preferably in the range of 150 to 300° F. for drying of water-based coatings and inks.

In a further embodiment, the flow and temperature of the air supplied to the infrared air bar is regulated to obtain a

desired convection heat flux to complement the infrared heat flux to the web being dried. This provides a unique means to preferentially direct the heating of the web while drying both wet and dry areas on the same web, as in the case of printing. While drying under conditions of constant infrared emitter temperature and constant convection air velocity and temperature, the wet areas of the web are substantially cooled by the evaporative energy needed to vaporize the solvent, such as water. As is well known to those skilled in drying, the wet areas tend to approach the wet bulb temperature and remain at approximately that temperature during the constant rate drying period, until sufficient liquid is evaporated and the evaporation rate is limited by the falling rate drying period. Upon entering the falling rate drying period, the web temperature then climbs as the evaporative cooling diminishes. In the case of printing, some areas of the web are heavily covered with ink while some areas may have little or no coverage. These low coverage areas are relatively dry and often enter the falling rate drying period almost immediately upon entering the dryer. Thus the web temperature in these areas increases significantly in contrast to relatively wet areas, and often reaches a temperature at the exit of the dryer which exceeds the desired level. This may result in damage to the web product as well as wasting energy in overheating these areas.

In embodiments disclosed herein, the high convection heat transfer characteristic of the infrared flotation bars is applied in combination with infrared radiation mode such that the web temperature difference between relatively wet and dry areas at the exit of the dryer may be reduced. This is accomplished by the combined action of the two heat transfer modes: convection and radiation. Those skilled in the art of heat transfer recognize that the heat flux via the two modes act simultaneously and the contribution from each mode may be additive or work opposite to another. That is, while infrared energy is heating an object, it may at the same time be losing heat via convection. It is an object of the embodiments disclosed herein to provide a balance of the two aforementioned heat flux modes such that the overheating of relatively dry areas, such as non-printed areas is avoided or mitigated without the limitations of prior art already described.

Typically when the web first enters the dryer, it is cooler than the air temperature and thus effectively heated additively by both radiation and convection modes. As the web increases in temperature, especially in relatively dry (low coverage) areas, the infrared energy continues to heat the web, but as the web temperature eventually exceeds the regulated air temperature in the dry areas, the convection heat transfer now acts opposite to the infrared radiation and the air tends to keep those areas of the web relatively cooler. Meanwhile, the wetter areas (higher coverage) will remain at a lower temperature (below the regulated air temperature) owing to the evaporative cooling effect previously described. Consequently, the drying rate is enhanced by both heat transfer modes in the wetter areas from heating by both radiation and convection. By regulation of the air temperature to a level just above the wet bulb temperature in the dryer, the combined infrared and convection drying characteristics of the present invention a selective drying condition is enabled wherein fast drying is promoted in high coverage areas while mitigating the tendency to overheat the web in low coverage areas.

In prior art, the only requirement of the cooling air has been to limit the temperature of the emitter and associated elements such as the reflector and lens. As mentioned above it is an object of the embodiments disclosed herein to regulate the temperature of the air supplied to the infrared air bar to meet a web temperature heating balance in wet versus dry areas. As the cooling air temperature is now desired to be a regulated

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variable, this places additional design requirements on the embodiment of the cooling provisions for emitter and associated elements. In the embodiments described herein, the cooling air flow volume and path take into consideration this variation in air temperature. Looking more specifically to the design of the infrared air bar, infrared electromagnetic energy waves pass from an emitter filament by transmission in a straightforward direct manner to impinge on a traversing web. Said infrared waves pass transmissively through the emitter bulb casing used to hold and protect the filament, and through a planar lens. The bulb casing and lens materials are typically of quartz material having transmissive properties in the wavelength range of infrared electromagnetic energy. Infrared electromagnetic waves are also reflected in an indirect manner from the emitter to a reflector surface that reflects the waves, which then further pass through the planar lens to impinge upon the traversing web. As is known to those skilled in the art of infrared energy, a portion of the electromagnetic energy that enters a transmissive material or impinges on a reflective surface is absorbed. This absorbed energy raises the temperature of the transmissive or reflective material and may lead to degradation of the transmissive or reflective property, substantially reducing the energy reaching the web, and also result in early failure of the emitter and lens material. This energy is useful in heating and drying the web when recovered in an air stream, which is then brought into fluid contact with the web. Energy recovery and cooling effectiveness are maximized when carried out in a manner that provides uniform fluid contact with a controlled quantity of air. Optimization of the present embodiments has shown that this can be accomplished by passing from 5 to 40%, preferably from 7 to 15%, of the total air supply delivered under pressure to the float bar through an air distribution means into uniform fluid contact with the emitter bulb, and further uniformly guide the flow path in fluid contact over the surface of the reflector, and further into uniform fluid contact with both faces of the planar lens. Most preferably, this flow of cooling air is in the range of 7 to 15% of the total supply air to the float bar. In addition, the uniform fluid contact of cooling air with the emitter bulb, reflector and lens surfaces prevent contamination by solvents and other materials mentioned previously.

In certain embodiments, there is disclosed a channel assembly adapted to be inserted or retrofitted into an air bar, wherein the channel assembly has a compartment defined by a bottom having at least one aperture and a pair of opposing sides, the compartment comprising an infrared light source, a reflector of infrared light, and a lens transmissive to infrared light. The aperture allows for the flow of cooling fluid about the infrared light source, reflector and lens in the compartment. The removable channel assembly is configured for replacement of the infrared emitter and to allow the setting of the pressurized cooling air flow to the optimum level. Thus, the channel can be removed and the infrared light source replaced or repaired, and the channel then reinserted into the air bar, or the channel can be removed and a new channel can be inserted into the air bar.

In a preferred embodiment, the setting of the flow of cooling air through the at least one aperture is adjustable. The flow through the at least one aperture is set by an adjustment of a moveable element in relation to a fixed element, so as to allow an increase or a decrease in the aperture flow area of the combined moveable and stationary elements. This setting is made by adjusting the position of said movable element to obtain sufficient cooling of the emitter and associated elements with the maximum regulation setting for the supply air temperature in order to avoid thermal degradation of the

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materials selected. In addition the cooling air flow is set to maintain the surface temperatures of the lens and air bar and other surfaces that may contact the web, should the web break or otherwise lose tension, to a temperature below the ignition temperature of the web material, preferably <400° F. The practical range for the cooling air flow setting has been found to be from 5 to 40%, most preferably 7 to 15%, of the total supply air delivered to the infrared air bar.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 is a cross-sectional view of an IR float bar in accordance with certain embodiments;

FIG. 2 is a cross-sectional view of the IR float bar of FIG. 1 showing infrared energy waves;

FIG. 3 is a cross-sectional view of the IR float bar of FIG. 1 showing airflow patterns;

FIG. 4 is a cross-sectional view of a single-side flotation IR air foil in accordance with certain embodiments;

FIG. 5 is a cross-sectional view of a single-side flotation IR step foil in accordance with certain embodiments;

FIGS. 6A-6D are schematic illustrations of various IR bar configurations in accordance with certain embodiments;

FIG. 7 is a cross-sectional view of a Coanda air float bar having two IR light sources in accordance with certain embodiments;

FIG. 8A is a top view of an air bar showing an air flow adjustment mechanism in accordance with certain embodiments;

FIG. 8B is a side view of an air bar showing an air flow adjustment mechanism in accordance with certain embodiments;

FIG. 8C is a bottom view of an air bar showing an air flow adjustment mechanism in accordance with certain embodiments;

FIG. 8D is an end cross-sectional view of an air bar showing an air flow adjustment mechanism in accordance with certain embodiments;

FIG. 9A is a top view of an air bar showing an air flow adjustment mechanism in accordance with certain embodiments;

FIG. 9B is an end cross-sectional view of an air bar showing an air flow adjustment mechanism in accordance with certain embodiments;

FIG. 10 is a schematic diagram of a dryer incorporating a plurality of IR float bars in conjunction with supply air, re-circulating air and exhaust air features in accordance with certain embodiments;

FIG. 11 is a schematic diagram of the dryer of FIG. 10A depicting supply air, re-circulating air and exhaust air flow paths;

FIG. 12 is a schematic diagram of a dryer incorporating a plurality of IR float bars in conjunction with supply air, re-circulating air and exhaust air features in accordance with certain embodiments; and

FIG. 13 is a schematic diagram of a dryer incorporating a plurality of IR float bars with controls in conjunction with supply air, re-circulating air and exhaust air features in accordance with certain embodiments.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

In general, the float bars disclosed herein have one or more primary air jets which discharge from slots. The primary jets create a pressure field to floatingly support a web. The air supplied to the primary jets may be optionally heated to enhance heat and/or mass transfer for drying of the web. Air

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for cooling the emitter, reflector and lens elements contained in a removable channel may be taken from the same supply plenum as the primary flotation air, or alternately ducted from a separate air source to the channel assembly. After contacting the emitter, reflector and optional planar lens, the cooling air is discharged through one or more secondary jets which sweep the face of the planar lens and prevent contact of the web and solvent materials from the lens.

FIGS. 1 and 2 show a preferred embodiment wherein the floater bar element 10 is of the Coanda type having two primary flotation jets; a first primary flotation slot 12A and a second primary flotation slot 12B. Two secondary air slots 14A and 14B, that are preferably 5 to 40% of the primary slots 12A, 12B, most preferably 15 to 30% are also provided as shown. Supply air enters the supply plenum 15 of the air bar 10 via a supply air feed inlet 16 (e.g., a plurality of oval shaped apertures) located at the bottom 18 of the air bar 10 and is distributed along the length of the air bar to obtain suitable distribution to the flotation jets as is known in the art. An infrared element is configured as a channel assembly comprised of a supporting channel 20 which contains a reflector 21 in fluid communication with the supply air plenum 15, or a separate cooling air source as mentioned earlier, by means of one or more apertures 22 which penetrate the base channel and are in substantial alignment with comparable apertures 23 in the reflector 21 at the point of tangent contact with the base channel 20. The total area of the apertures is preferably equivalent in flow area to 20 to 100% of the area of the primary flotation slots 12A, 12B, that is, slot length \times slot width \times number of slots. The active area of the apertures may be adjusted by aligning the array of apertures in the reflector 21 with a comparable array of apertures in the base channel 20, ranging from full alignment to complete closure, thus acting as an adjustable damper for setting of the cooling air flow. Suitable mechanical means of sliding the reflector with respect to the base channel to achieve the desired alignment can easily be accomplished by those skilled in the art.

FIGS. 8A-8D show preferred embodiments for the sliding and stationary elements in the channel assembly to enable the adjustment of the infrared emitter cooling air flow. FIGS. 8A and 8B show a sliding adjustment element 27 with circular apertures 22a that can be aligned with corresponding preferably larger apertures 22 in the removable channel 20. Corresponding oversized apertures are located in reflector element 21 such that these apertures coincide with the apertures 22 in removable channel 20. Sliding adjustment element 27 has adjustment slots 27a to allow the moveable element 27 to slide in position relative to reflector 21 and removable channel 20 such that the aperture 22 open area is reduced from the fully concentric alignment position. Once the appropriate position of the adjustment element is found, the adjustment element can be fixed in place such as by tightening bolts or the like in the slot 27a. FIGS. 9A and 9B show a more preferred embodiment wherein apertures 22a in the sliding adjustment element 27 and the apertures 22 in removable channel 20 are diamond shaped, thus allowing a finer adjustment of flow when moving the sliding adjustment element when reducing the aperture 22 flow area. Apertures 23 in the reflector 21 are oblong.

The removable channel 20 includes a bottom member 40 that is supported on distribution member 24, and opposite side members 41A, 41B that each terminate in inwardly facing terminal ends 11A, 11B. The outer surface of the chamber 20 transitioning between the sides 41A, 41B and the respective terminal ends 11A, 11B are curved so as to define, with the corresponding terminal ends of the sides 7A, 7B of the air bar 10, Coanda slots, which are the primary flotation slots

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12A, 12B. The removable channel 20 can be slidingly removed from the air bar 10, along with its contents, and either be replaced by another channel, or by the same channel after maintenance or replacement of the lens and/or bulb contained therein.

An initial air distribution member 19, such as a perforated plate, can be provided in the air bar 10 to enhance uniform supply air distribution. An open area of about 13% in such a member has been found to be suitable. A secondary air distribution member 24, such as plate perforated with slots or holes, can be positioned downstream of the initial air distribution member 19 as shown, and also can serve to support the removable channel 20.

The channel 20 contains an infrared light source 30, such as an IR emitter bulb commercially available from Heraeus Noblelight GmbH. A lens 32, preferably a planar quartz lens, can be positioned above the IR light source 30 as shown. The lens encloses the emitter while allowing transmission of electromagnetic energy in the range of infrared wavelengths to pass through and reach the web 50 floating above the bar 10 (FIG. 2). Electromagnetic energy emitted from the IR light source 30 passes through the lens 32 and directly radiates onto the web 50. A reflector 21 is also contained in the channel 20, and is preferably parabolic and made of a suitable reflective material such as stainless steel or aluminum. Preferably the reflector 21 extends from the lens downwardly below the IR light source, thereby surrounding the IR light source except in the area occupied by the lens, so that light emitted from the light source radiates either directly through the lens or is reflected by the reflector towards the lens, and is then ultimately radiated onto the web 50, as shown diagrammatically in FIG. 2.

The secondary slots 14A, 14B are defined by the clearance (e.g., 0.0010" to 0.003") provided between the lens 32 and the inwardly facing terminal ends 11A, 11B of the chamber 20. As illustrated diagrammatically in FIG. 3, supply air fed into the air bar at inlet 16 flows through the perforated initial air distribution member 19, through perforated secondary air distribution member 24, out through primary flotation slots 12A, 12B where a pressure pad or field is created to floatingly support the web 50. Supply air also passes through the cooling air entry jets in the member 24, the bottom 40 of the channel 20, and the reflector 21, and flows in the area defined by the reflector 21 and the lens 32. That air thus cools the emitter 30, the reflector and the lens. The resulting heated air then flows out of the interior of the channel 20 through one of the secondary slots 14A, 14B, and sweeps the face of the lens 32, thereby preventing contact of the web and solvent materials and other debris or contaminants with the lens 32. Those skilled in the art will appreciate that the fluid for cooling the emitter, reflector and lens elements may be ducted from a separate air source to the channel assembly.

In certain embodiments, the lens 32 can be omitted, and the air discharged from the channel assembly can be used as a virtual lens, effectively shielding the emitter 30 from the web and potentially hazardous debris or contaminants.

FIG. 4 illustrates an embodiment wherein the float bar is a single-side flotation air foil 10'. In this embodiment, a single primary flotation jet 12' is provided to discharge supply air to float the web 50, and a single secondary jet 14' is provided to discharge cooling air from the removable channel assembly 20'. The air foil 10' is defined in part by a header, which in the embodiment shown, is generally rectangular in cross-section except for its top portion. Opposite sides 7A', 7B' of the header terminate in respective top flange portions 8A', 8B'. Top flange portion 8A' is angled, preferably at about 65° relative to vertical, and terminates in a bent portion 13'. Top

flange portion **8B'** extends towards opposite side **7A'** in a substantially horizontal fashion. The header defines an interior space **15'** that serves as a plenum for the gas that is received via the one or more holes (not shown) at the base of the air foil **10'** that are in gas-receiving communication with a gas supply (not shown). The header is positioned on suitable ducting by aligning the aligners **3** at each end plate of the header and is sealed by retainer gasket **4**. A diffuser plate having a plurality of spaced holes can be positioned in the header to help distribute the supply of gas evenly as it flows towards the slots.

The flange portion **8A'** and bent portion **13'** of the header, together with the flat portion **23** of the member **25**, defines the primary slot of the air foil. Air flows out the primary slot **12'**, and continues in the direction of web travel towards the wing **35** of the air foil, which wing **35** terminates in a flange **34** extending downwardly at a right angle about 0.5 inches. The air then travels along the top face of the wing in the direction of web travel to support the web. As in the embodiment of FIG. 1, an optionally removable channel assembly **20** is provided, and contains a reflector **21**, a lens **32**, and an IR light source **30**. Air enters the channel assembly **20** through one or more apertures **22'** in the member **25**, each aligned with a respective aperture **23'** in the bottom **40'** of the channel **20**, and cools the reflector **21**, the light source **30**, and the lens **32**. The cooling air (now heated) is discharged from the channel **20** via the clearance between the lens **32** and the flat port **23**.

FIG. 5 illustrates an embodiment wherein the float bar is a single-side flotation step foil **10"**, such as that disclosed in U.S. Pat. No. 7,530,179, the disclosure of which is hereby incorporated by reference. Like the air foil **10'** of FIG. 4, an optionally removable channel assembly **20** can be provided that contains the reflector **21**, IR light source **30** and lens **32**. Differences between the embodiment of FIG. 5 and that of FIG. 4 include in the FIG. 5 embodiment the provision of a second secondary slot **14B'**, spaced from and stepped down from the primary slot **12A**, is to aid in floating the web **50**. Air discharged from the secondary discharge slot **14B** travels parallel to the web. Air discharged from the primary discharge slot **12A** is gathered into the air stream of the secondary discharge slot **14B'** in a direction parallel to the web transport direction. Between the primary discharge slot and the secondary discharge slot is a generally flat web support surface, including the face of the lens **32**. Downstream of the secondary discharge slot, in the direction of web travel, is a second web support surface that comprises a wing portion that slopes downwardly as it extends away from the secondary discharge slot **14B'**. This second web support surface optionally can include a second lens **332** that forms part of an optional second channel assembly **200** comprising a reflector **221**, an IR light source **300**, and the lens **332**. the side **7B** of the stepfoil can include one or more apertures **60** to allow supply air (or air from another source) to enter the channel assembly and cool the components therein as above.

FIG. 7 illustrates a further embodiment, in a Coanda nozzle having two Coanda discharge slots **12A"**, **12B"**. In the embodiment shown, an IR light source **30"** is positioned upstream, in the direction of web travel, of the first Coanda discharge slot **12A**. Bent member **8A"** that defined in part the Coanda discharge slot **12A"** includes one or more apertures that allow air to pass through and flow about the IR light source **30"** to cool the same. A lens **32"** can be positioned above the light source **30"** that is transmissive to electromagnetic energy, and if provided, the lens is also cooled by the flow of air that cools the light source **30"**. Alternatively, the cooling air can function as a virtual lens, keeping the light source **30"** cool and free of debris and contaminants. A second

IR light source **30A"** can be positioned downstream, in the direct of web travel, of the second Coanda slot **12B"**, arranged in a manner similar to the upstream assembly. The downstream assembly is shown without a lens, although one could be used as in the upstream assembly.

FIGS. 6A-6D illustrate suitable arrangements of pluralities of infrared bars with respect to a traversing web **270**. It is noted that the air bars shown are illustrative only; any of the air bar embodiments disclosed herein (e.g., Coanda, air foil, step foil, etc. can be used). Other arrangements are also possible.

FIG. 6A illustrates a plurality of infrared air bars **272a-272n** positioned below a traversing web **270**.

FIG. 6B illustrates a plurality of infrared air bars **274a-274n** positioned above a traversing web **270**.

FIG. 6C illustrates a plurality of infrared air bars **276a-276n** and a plurality of infrared air bars **278a-278n** in an opposing vertically aligned arrangement about a traversing web **270** for rapid drying of the traversing web **270**.

FIG. 6D illustrates a plurality of infrared air bars **280a-280n** and a plurality of infrared air bars **282a-282n** arranged in alternating opposing vertical arrangement about a traversing web **270** creating a sinusoidal shape for the traversing web **270**.

FIGS. 10-13 illustrate preferred embodiments of infrared air float bars arranged in a dryer enclosure **301** having a web **270** entering said enclosure through web slot **305a** and exiting through exit slot **305b**, said web floatingly traverses through a combined convection and infrared radiation heating zone created by infrared air bars which direct infrared energy to the web and handle distribution of heated supply air jets to impinge on the web. The enclosure **301** contains the spent heated air after fluid contact with the web such that collection of at least a portion of the spent air may be recovered for re-circulation to the air bars. At least a portion of the spent air is exhausted from the enclosure as described in the embodiments herein.

FIG. 10 illustrates a dryer embodiment **300a** comprised of a plurality of infrared air bars **280a-280n** mounted to and in fluid communication with an air supply distribution header **310a**, and a plurality of infrared air bars **282a-282n** mounted to and in fluid communication with an air supply distribution header **310b**. Fluid communication between the plurality of infrared air bars **280a-280n** and **282a-282n** to each respective header **310a** and **310b** is made through feed openings **315a-315n**. The air feed openings **315a-315n** are connected and sealed to air bar feed inlet **16** (FIG. 1) by means of separation joints **316a-316n** which allow easy disconnection and removal of the infrared air bars from the dryer. The joints **316a-316n** may be sealed with gasket material, compression seats, or other similar means as are known to those skilled in the art of flotation dryer design. FIG. 11 illustrates the air flow paths created by the air flow elements within the enclosure **301** of dryer **300a** of FIG. 10 herein described. A zone supply fan **320** collects heated air from inside the enclosure **301** and discharges said air under pressure into a plenum **322** having an optional heat source **325**. This heat source may be a fuel burner, a heat exchange coil from a heating media such a hot water, steam, or thermal oil, or preferably an electric element duct heater. After passing through optional heater **325**, the heated air is directed to air distribution headers **310a** and **310b** via ducts **326a** and **326b**, respectively. Optional heater **325**, if provided, may be controlled by an air temperature control loop **340**. The heated air is then distributed to infrared air bars through feed openings **315a-315n** wherein it is used to cool the internal elements of the infrared air bars. The air flow paths and cooling function within each infrared air bar have

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been described previously. Electrical power fed to the emitters is regulated by an operator through a user interface in communication with an SCR according to the web drying load in order to achieve a satisfactorily dried product. Once discharged from the air bar, the air comes into fluid contact with the web to convectively exchange heat and mass with the web 270. Following this exchange step, at least a portion of this "spent" air is drawn back to the inlet of supply fan 320. An amount of room air is drawn into enclosure 301 through web slots 305a and 305b. An exhaust flow balancing this room air and any evaporated solvents from the web must be continually ventilated out of the enclosure. To this purpose, a separate exhaust fan 331 draws at least a portion of said spent air through exhaust duct 332 and flow control damper 336 and discharges it to atmosphere. Alternatively, the exhaust flow rate could be controlled by a variable speed motor and drive connected to exhaust fan 331 instead of control damper 336. The separate exhaust fan 331 of dryer embodiment 300a is necessary for safely handling volatile flammable solvent materials and/or in the case a direct fired fuel burner is used for optional heater 325. Exhaust flow safety ventilation volume and treatment equipment (not shown) for air polluting materials in said exhaust may be required based on requirements set forth by parties having such jurisdiction as will be understood by those familiar with such regulations in their locale.

FIG. 12 illustrates a preferred dryer embodiment 300b for drying a non-flammable solvent, such as water, wherein supplemental heat beyond that provided by the infrared air bars is not needed to meet the thermal load required by the web. In some cases, where web drying heat load requirements are less than would be output by fully populating all air bar positions in distribution headers 310a and 310b, one or more positions for mounting air bars may be occupied by an air bar without an active infrared emitter, thus reducing the connected power load of the dryer. In the illustration of FIG. 12, the supply air header 310a is not fully populated with infrared air bars, but includes two non-infrared air bars 281a and 281b. Note these non-infrared air bars may be of a number of types which are familiar to those skilled in the art of air bar design. The non-infrared air bars are preferentially located near the web exit end of the dryer, and in the case of a single-side coating on the web, located on the uncoated side. Electrical power fed to the emitters is regulated by an operator through a user interface in communication with an SCR according to the web drying load in order to achieve a satisfactorily dried product. The supply air temperature is regulated by control loop 340 to maintain a set point by modulating the amount of exhaust through exhaust duct 330 by means of damper 335.

FIG. 13 illustrates a preferred embodiment for a single-side coated or printed web wherein the ink or coating is on the bottom side of the web. Electrical power fed to emitters 282a-282n is regulated by an operator through a user interface in communication with an SCR 342 according to the web drying load in order to achieve a satisfactorily dried product. The air temperature is controlled through control loop 340a which regulates the power setting to SCR 341 which in turn modulates the power to the emitters in infrared air bars 280a-280n facing the uncoated side of the web.

The operation of the air bars will be illustrated with reference to the embodiment shown in FIG. 3. A plurality of infrared electromagnetic energy rays increase drying capacity because the infrared source is located at the point of highest heat transfer, e.g., between the discharge slots and radiate from the infrared source 32 either directly or indirectly through the lens 32. The infrared drying energy is transmitted for heating a traversing web being processed in a

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dryer. A portion of the infrared rays reflect off the parabolic reflector 21 and through the lens 32 to impart infrared drying energy upon and heating the web. The wave length of the infrared electromagnetic rays emitted from the infrared source 32 can be short wave with a wave length of 0.78 to 1.2 microns, medium wave length with a wave length of 1.2 to 4.0 microns or long wave length of 4.0 to at least 10 or more microns. In certain embodiments, the infrared source 32 is positioned at a point of maximum energy transfer.

Pressurized air to float the web enters the infrared air bar through the plurality of oval shaped air inlets 16 to float the web. From the air inlets, the pressurized air proceeds as indicated by dashed arrow lines (FIG. 3) through the holes of the initial air distribution member 19, through the holes of the secondary air distribution member 24, through the Coanda slots 12A and 12B, along the Coanda curves defined by the side members 41A, 41B of the channel assembly 20, and then inwardly along the upper surface of the lens 32 and upwardly, thus providing float lift for the web 50 and also carrying away solvent vapors in the web. Air also flows into the channel 20 and around the elements disposed therein to cool the same, and then ultimately leaks out through the clearance between the lens 32 and the side members 41A, 41B and sweeps over the outer face of the lens 32.

Direct and indirect infrared energy rays impinge on the web 50 and heat the web as it passes over the pressure pad created by the Coanda slots, thus drying and evaporating solvents from the web. This, in combination with impinging flow of air, maximizes the heat transfer in the area of the pressure pad.

Output of the infrared source 30 can be variably controlled, such as by an SCR so that the amount of energy output transmitted from the infrared source includes a range from full power to no power, and any variable range therebetween.

Embodiments disclosed herein provide an air float bar with at least one primary air jet for flotation flow and heat transfer to the web and at least one integrated infrared emitter for use in the drying or heat treatment of webs, so as to maximize the utilization of infrared energy to heat and/or dry the web when in combination with at least one secondary air jet. The at least one secondary air jet is supplied by about 5 to 40% of the total air (preferably 7 to 15%) which is first heated by passing in fluid contact with at least one infrared emitter and is preferably also guided in fluid contact with a reflector, and further guided in fluid contact with a lens that is transmissible to infrared energy. The secondary jet is guided in fluid contact in a substantially parallel flow direction to the lens surfaces and provides at least a portion of the flotation air in conjunction with the at least one primary air jet, the parallel flow providing sufficient cooling to the emitter, reflector and lens elements to prevent ignition of combustible web or coating materials even under upset conditions. An optimum amount of cooling air is guided in contact with the emitter, reflector and lens surfaces to promote effective cooling of the emitter, reflector and lens, and further the cooling air is guided after contacting and gaining heat from said surfaces to deliver mass flow and thermal energy to the web by convection. The cooling air is also guided over the surfaces to prevent contact of the solvent-laden air inside the drying enclosure from contacting said surfaces, thus preventing their contamination.

From the forgoing discussion, it can be appreciated that the combined convection and radiation heat transfer modes of the present invention are driven substantially independently by virtue of the convection air temperature and emitter temperature, respectively. This feature can be used to advantage in the embodiments disclosed herein for the purpose of rapidly drying high moisture areas without excessively heating low

moisture areas. Such disparities in moisture across a web are common in printing where heavy ink images are present alongside of low coverage or unprinted areas. The embodiments disclosed herein provide a selectivity in heating wet areas in that the heavy print areas require large heat flux to dry quickly and remain at or near the wet bulb temperature due to the evaporative cooling effect, thus these areas will be substantially heated by both the radiation and the high velocity convection modes provided by this infrared floatation air bar. On the other hand, those areas having little or no coverage will tend to increase in temperature by the infrared radiation from the emitters, but near the exit of the dryer can be cooled by the convection air to avoid overheating. The electromagnetic energy from the infrared elements is emitted at a relatively high temperature (typically $>2000^{\circ}\text{F.}$) compared to the web temperature (typically 150 to 300°F.). As a result, according to the Stefan-Boltzman law the emissive heat flux to the web changes relatively little as the web temperature increases because the emitter temperature is quite high and the emitter temperature dominates the radiation flux potential according to the forth power of absolute temperature. By contrast, the heat transfer by convection is driven by a linear potential between air temperature and web temperature. The maximum web temperature for a given web material being thermally processed is often limited during the drying operation in order to avoid quality defects in the web or coating. When ink or coating materials are overheated beyond their maximum thermal rating as specified by the manufacturer, they may degrade in function and appearance often becoming discolored, brittle or chalky. Similarly, if the web substrate materials are overheated beyond their maximum thermal rating as specified by the manufacturer they may degrade in mechanical performance as well as appearance, often becoming discolored, brittle or distorted. For example, polymer web materials such as PET may soften and stretch causing distortion of the initially planar web resulting in waves or cockling, especially at temperatures exceeding 200°F. Paper webs may exhibit similar out-of-plane distortion due to hygroscopic shrinkage of over-dried areas having less than 3% moisture in proximity to heavy coated or printed areas having moisture levels several percent higher than the adjoining areas. Paperboard tends to curl if the moisture on one side is reduced to levels several percent lower than the opposite side. Additionally, paper and paperboard material will tend to brown and become brittle at temperatures in the range of 350 to 400°F. , and eventually burn at higher temperatures. In order to avoid these problems, printers and converters of web materials will be familiar with the maximum temperature limitations for processing of the web and coating through specifications provided by the suppliers of the materials, or from pilot drying trials, or by experience with same or similar materials in prior production processing. In embodiments disclosed herein, if the air temperature set point is selected at a temperature just below the maximum web temperature to be tolerated in the hottest (driest) areas of the web, the infrared heating in these areas will be countered by convective cooling, thus mitigating excessive temperature in said driest areas. Air temperature set points from 10 to 50 Fahrenheit degrees below the maximum web temperature to be tolerated were found to be effective in avoiding overheating of the web. Alternatively, the air temperature may be selected and regulated to be typically in the range of 30 to 100 Fahrenheit degrees above the wet bulb temperature in the dryer (wet bulb typically $<180^{\circ}\text{F.}$) the convective flux potential is diminished and even reversed, thus slowing the rate of heating of the web in the driest areas once the web temperature in those areas exceeds the air temperature.

In order to limit the overheating of the driest areas as described, the convection coefficient provided by the infrared air bars must be suitably high, exceeding that of conventional cooling air systems employed in non-flotation infrared dryers. Suitable air bar heat convection heat transfer coefficients are in the range of about 10 to about $40\text{ BTU/hr-ft}^2\text{-F.}$ Suitable air bar slot jet velocities are in the range of from about 5000 to about 16000 feet per minute.

The air temperature supplied to the nozzles may be regulated by adding a controlled input of heat from an independent heat source such as an electric resistance coil, hot oil or steam coil, or a burner located in the ducting supplying the air to bars. In preferred embodiments, the need for an independent source of heat is obviated by recovering the heat from the emitters that is not absorbed by the radiation mode into the web into the re-circulated air. This includes the heat taken up in the emitter cooling air as previously described, and similarly the heat recovered from stray infrared energy (electromagnetic waves that reflect or otherwise impinge on surfaces other than the web) that tends to elevate the temperature of other surfaces inside the dryer over which the re-circulation air flows, and heat from those areas of the web that have been heated above the supply air temperature by the radiation mode as described earlier. This heat recovered in the re-circulation air may be retained by minimizing the amount of air exhausted to about 10% or less of the air bar supply air thus maximizing the re-circulating air temperature. On the other hand, if it is desired to lower the air temperature, the amount of exhaust may be increased to about 30% or more thus drawing in more ambient air that must be heated in the re-circulating flow. Those skilled in the art of dryers will be familiar with regulation of exhaust flow by means of a damper, or fan with a variable speed drive, in order to accomplish the air flow regulation described. This regulation may be done manually by an operator or by a closed-loop controller sensing air temperature and modulating the exhaust flow accordingly. In another preferred embodiment, the air temperature may be regulated by modulating the input power to at least one infrared emitter through a closed-loop controller. In the most preferred embodiment, the primary regulation of the air temperature is made by setting the dryer exhaust to achieve a desired temperature as previously mentioned, and further controlled by regulating the power to at least one emitter with a closed-loop controller which regulates the set point for the power output of an SCR supplying power to the at least one emitter.

In one application example, a printed paper web with a water-based ink, is to be dried. The expected wet bulb temperature is 135°F. and the convection air temperature is set to 170°F. The net radiative heat flux from the emitters to the unprinted web is $6,500\text{ BTU/hr-ft}^2$ and the convection coefficient per side is $25\text{ BTU/hr-ft}^2\text{-F.}$ Thus the initial combined convection and radiation heating rate is $11,500\text{ BTU/hr-ft}^2$ and the terminal temperature of the web, where radiation flux is offset by convection cooling in the unprinted areas of the web, will be $\sim 300^{\circ}\text{F.}$ Without the contributing effects of the flotation air bar convection air, the initial heating rate is only $6,500\text{ BTU/hr-ft}^2$ resulting in slower heating, and the calculated terminal temperature is over 800°F. , well above the ignition point of paper.

In the preferred dryer embodiment, the infrared air bars are placed 8 to 20 inches apart on each side of the web, with nozzle air jet velocities in the range of 5000 to $16,000\text{ fpm}$, with the total emitter heat flux per emitter element mounted in each air bar in the range of 100 to 200 watts per inch for medium wave carbon emitters, and 200 to 400 watts per inch

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for near IR emitters. Air temperature set points in the range of 150 to 250° F. are preferred for water based coatings on paper substrates.

What is claimed is:

1. An air flotation bar, comprising:

a header,

first and second primary discharge slots for discharging fluid for supporting a web;

a channel assembly positioned between said first and second primary discharge slots and comprising an internal compartment containing:

an infrared light source for emitting electromagnetic energy,

a reflector for reflecting electromagnetic energy emitted by said infrared light source, and

a lens having a web-facing surface;

at least one aperture in said channel assembly for introducing fluid into said internal compartment for cooling said infrared light source and said reflector; and

at least one secondary discharge slot configured to discharge said fluid introduced into said internal compartment parallel to said web-facing surface of said lens and to said web;

wherein said first and second primary discharge slots and said at least one secondary discharge slot are configured such that 5% to 40% of total air is discharged via said at least one secondary discharge slot.

2. The air flotation bar of claim 1, wherein said channel is removable from said bar.

3. The air flotation bar of claim 1, wherein said first primary discharge slot is a Coanda slot.

4. The air flotation bar of claim 1, wherein said second primary discharge slot is downstream, in the direction of web travel, of said first primary discharge slot.

5. The air flotation bar of claim 1, wherein said lens is transmissive to infrared light emitted from said infrared light source.

6. The air flotation bar of claim 5, wherein said infrared light source radiates directly through said lens to transmit infrared energy to a traversing web.

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7. The air flotation bar of claim 5, wherein said infrared light source radiates infrared energy that reflects off said reflector and through said lens to impart infrared energy to a traversing web.

8. The air flotation bar of claim 1, wherein the open area of said at least one aperture is adjustable.

9. The air flotation bar of claim 8, further comprising an adjustment member having at least one adjustment aperture, said member being slidable with respect to said channel to adjust the relative position of said at least one adjustment aperture and said aperture in said channel to adjust the open area of said aperture in said channel.

10. The air flotation bar of claim 1, wherein said first and second primary discharge air slots and said at least one secondary discharge air slot are configured such that 7% to 15% of total air is discharged via said at least one secondary discharge slot.

11. A web dryer comprising a housing containing a plurality of air flotation bars;

wherein the air flotation bar comprises:

a header,

first and second primary discharge slots for discharging fluid for supporting a web;

a channel assembly positioned between said first and second primary discharge slots and comprising an internal compartment containing:

an infrared light source for emitting electromagnetic energy,

a reflector for reflecting electromagnetic energy emitted by said infrared light source, and

a lens having a web-facing surface;

at least one aperture in said channel assembly for introducing fluid into said internal compartment for cooling said infrared light source and said reflector; and

at least one secondary discharge slot configured to discharge said fluid introduced into said internal compartment parallel to said web-facing surface of said lens and to said web;

wherein said first and second primary discharge slots and said at least one secondary discharge slot are configured such that 5% to 40% of total air is discharged via said at least one secondary discharge slot.

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